

Testimony
Of
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to the United States
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International Relations
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify on the critical topic of national reconciliation in Iraq. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank you and the Ranking Member for your leadership on this important subcommittee, and the work of the entire subcommittee on the subject of Iraq. We are also grateful, Mr. Chairman, for the many visits you have led to Iraq, and your two most recent visits to Iraqi Kurdistan as well. We hope that others will follow in your footsteps, realizing that an accurate analysis of Iraq requires visits to every region of the country.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the brave men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces who are serving or who have served in Iraq as well as the diplomats and civilians who labor tirelessly with Iraqi officials to ensure that the fruit of our partnership is a prosperous and peaceful Iraq.

Iraq is a traumatized country; traumatized by its horrific past and at times its faltering present. To overcome that trauma and to build a robust, inclusive political process, Iraq requires a national reconciliation process.

To understand what national reconciliation involves in Iraq, we must first recognize that national reconciliation means something very different to each of Iraq's major communities: the Kurds, Shi'a and Sunni Arabs. Each tends to regard national reconciliation through the prism of their political goals because of their profound insecurities about the future.

Many are wondering what it actually means to be Iraqi, or if there is something actually called Iraq. The manner in which Iraq was built as a state ensured that conflict was part of its architecture. Iraq was a country that many of its inhabitants did not want; a country they were stuck with; a country that became a place of great suffering for them, and a

country that for others became a source of enrichment and privilege. If there is to be national reconciliation, the fundamental problem that there is no common understanding of what it means to be an Iraqi must be accepted.

That lack of a core, common identity has been exacerbated by the conduct of reconstruction since the liberation of Iraq in 2003. Expectations were high and many of these expectations have not been met. Instead, the violent and illogical opposition of a minority within the Sunni Arab community, combined with a weak Iraqi state has led to further polarization. Instead of coming together as Iraqis, insecure about the future, the inhabitants of Iraq have instead emphasized their ethnic and sectarian identities. In Arab Iraq, families are being torn apart by the Sunni-Shi'a divide. Kurds, who have a functioning society and government, have mediated between these two sects. Ironically, the Kurds, once Iraq's internally displaced, have become the cordial hosts of tens of thousands of Arabs internally displaced by Sunni-Shi'a violence.

The ethnic and sectarian identities that Iraqis suffered and died for are inescapable. They should not be the only identities that Iraqis have, but they should not be ignored because they do not fit the visions that some had for the new Iraq.

Too often, the ideal has been exhorted over the practical. Instead, we must deal with what we have and treat ethnic and sectarian identities not as the end of Iraq, but rather as our last opportunity to save it. By embracing Iraqis' identities as they are and shaping a political order that accommodates and accepts them, we can achieve true national reconciliation.

Iraq's past and present is defined by a fundamental clash of two visions. One seeks a unitary state, an approach that is not viable in a country as diverse as Iraq, which was imposed with violence in the past. Many, but not all, of those who advocate this central autocracy are a violent minority within the Sunni Arab community. They believe that they have a right to rule. They are motivated by a supremacist ideology. Those who seek to impose this vision do so with all the violent means at their disposal and will, if allowed, increase the violence.

The second vision, held by Iraq's two largest communities, the Shi'a Arabs and the Kurds, by and large, advocate a decentralized government, a democratic federation. This vision was endorsed in a democratic referendum that ratified the August 2005 constitution. Like all democratic constitutions, the new Iraqi constitution is not a perfect document. It is a product of hard argued compromise. It is nonetheless the only democratically ratified constitution in the region and, if implemented could lay the foundations for a functioning democracy.

By allowing Iraqis the right to determine their own futures, the constitution will foster success stories similar to that of Iraqi Kurdistan. The constitution allows for Iraqis to organize themselves the way they want. Kurdistan today stands as a federal region, with its own governance and security – I am proud to state that today the Kurdistan region stands as a success story, in part because of the support and protection of the US over the

past 15 years. If others in the country want to federalize the rest of Iraq, providing such steps are taken democratically and with the support of the people who live in those regions, then we must stand on the side of the constitution, and not obstruct democracy.

The Iraqi government's national reconciliation plan complements the democratic federalism of the constitution. It does so by seeking to provide justice for the victims and the perpetrators, inclusion for those who are uneasy with the new Iraq and security for all.

To provide justice, the plan seeks to reform the de-Ba'athification process. The Kurdish political leadership believes that the de-Ba'athification should be carried out wisely and carefully in order to bring to full justice those who served in the regime of Saddam Hussein and committed crimes against humanity and genocide, while allowing those who genuinely want to participate in rebuilding this country and who want to play a constructive role the opportunity to show their sincerity in actions rather than words. The tragedy of the political crimes is that their scale is so great that not every perpetrator can realistically be brought to justice and not every victim can see their suffering vindicated in court.

Nonetheless, national reconciliation requires that those with blood on their hands should never hold senior government posts, be in the security services or be in position to harm Iraqi citizens again. If we allow criminals of the former regime to hold senior posts in the new political order, we will be building a new country on rotten foundations. National reconciliation also requires that not all of those who joined the Ba'th Party be punished for carrying that criminal organization's membership card. Many joined the Ba'th Party for petty, careerist reasons. We may question the morality of such a choice, but pragmatism demands that we not punish it and stigmatize it for life. The Kurdish leadership has taken the lead in this regard and has talked to members of the former regime who have shown an interest in being part of the new Iraq. It is not easy for Kurds to sit at the same table as Iraqi generals who once regarded the valleys and villages of Kurdistan as a war zone, but we have done so.

Bringing elements of the insurgency into the political process will also be difficult. Again the Kurds have led the way. A major component of the national reconciliation plan involves a potential amnesty for certain elements of the insurgency. As U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad correctly stated before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "amnesties are inherently an element of agreements to end conflict. It is a part of the package of the things that need to be done."

The amnesty offer should not be extended to foreign terrorists or home grown extremists who are not willing to cease fighting against the Iraqi government and Coalition forces. What it should do is allow the mass of the insurgency to know that it can lay down their arms and be part of a new Iraq that will not exact retribution, but that will instead rehabilitate them into society and give them a future. The Kurds are certainly ready to take this step and our leadership has made it plain that we will talk to those who genuinely represent the insurgency. What is required now is a sign from the insurgents that they will forsake their supremacist ideology in favor of political compromise.

National reconciliation also means tackling the militias. As CENTCOM commander General John Abizaid said at a recent Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, “there are militias that are benign or that are working closely in conjunction with the state to provide some additional security, and they do not need to be disbanded right away. Those that are sponsoring death squads need to be dealt with immediately.” Our goal should be security forces accountable to government institutions. In the interim, given the security problems that we face, especially in Baghdad, Iraq has to accept the existence of some benign militias as a temporary measure.

What will not be accepted is the existence of death squads and those who abuse the cover of an official uniform to commit sectarian crimes. The Iraqi government needs to be consistent on this matter, for without it Iraqis will not feel confidence in their institutions.

Much has been said regarding the Kurdish security forces, known as *Peshmerga*. The *Peshmerga* are not a militia. It is an organized, professional military force that possesses a transparent chain of command that is always accountable to the government that is elected by the people. These fighters, committed to Iraq’s freedom, have been called upon by a civilian leadership to defend the security of the Kurdistan region, and it is in part due to their bravery, professionalism and competency that the Kurdistan region is today Iraq’s most stable and secure. The *Peshmerga* took the second largest number of casualties during the first phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and were the only indigenous armed force to fight with Americans in the liberation of Iraq. Since OIF, many thousands of *Peshmerga* have left the Kurdistan region to join the new Iraqi forces and to assist the Coalition in its fight against terrorists and insurgents, and they have done so with valor. Former *Peshmerga* are widely regarded as the best troops available to the new Iraq and they symbolize the Kurds’ commitment to Iraq’s success.

The main planks of the national reconciliation plan, outlined above, need to be buttressed by a national pact on oil and potential constitutional revisions. Oil is Iraq’s greatest asset and its most abused resource. Many Iraqis, the Kurds in particular, feel that the oil has been a curse. From Iraq’s inception until 1996, when the United Nations started administering the UN Oil-for-Food program, Kurds were systematically robbed of their fair share of Iraq’s resources. Instead, all that they inherited from successive Iraqi regimes was a swathe of destruction, and neglect. Although the UN Oil-for-Food program set an important precedent by recognizing that Kurdistan was entitled to a specific allocation of national oil revenues, the program was, as we observed at the time, poorly managed and implemented and was, in many ways, a scandal. Given these experiences, Kurds feel little confidence that any Iraqi government in Baghdad, even one including many Kurdish ministers, will safeguard their share of national resources.

As with national reconciliation, what is needed for a sound oil policy is balance. We need to end the complete centralization of the country’s resources while recognizing that Baghdad can play a useful role in ensuring fairness and checks and balances. Iraq’s regions, including Kurdistan, must play a key role in the development of the nation’s oil and gas sectors, as called for in the constitution. Regions should not be left at the mercy

of Baghdad to receive their fair share of Iraq's wealth; history is instructive. A preliminary agreement on oil has been reached recently. Allocation and distribution of Iraq's wealth must be structured in a way that ensures that all of Iraq's citizens, including those that live in non-oil producing regions, benefit from the country's vast wealth. More work needs to be done, but if we take the view that the government in Baghdad and the regions each has a positive role to play, then we will square the circle on how to fairly distribute Iraq's oil wealth.

The final element of the current Iraqi government policy is to allow for constitutional revisions. There are, of course, those who say that there is no need to revise the constitution, that it reflects the settled will of the vast majority of Iraqis and that those who seek revisions had ample opportunity to participate in the constitutional process but chose violence instead. Such a view has its adherents and its logic, but it is the wrong approach. We must give dialogue a chance.

It is in that spirit of consensus and cooperation, that Iraqi officials have agreed on a four month period to allow those who were not part of the constitutional drafting process to recommend textual amendments. We have been expecting those who asked for this provision to take advantage of it. Instead, we have all been surprised by their lack of interest in the issue. This may be a sign that those politicians who criticized the constitution no longer believe that constitutional changes will address the concerns of certain communities in the country. Instead, what they are signaling to us is that effective and improved governance, and not constitutional details, is what is required to have an impact on Iraqis lives and to change citizens' allegiances away from acquiescing to insurgent groups and militias to the state.

Nonetheless, we remain open to constitutional revisions. There must be a spirit of compromise and understanding, with respect to the rights of others, and a belief that to accept less than you feel you are entitled to, less than what the decades of suffering of your people demands, is more practical. This has been the approach of the Kurdish leadership. Indeed, it is for this reason, I believe, that Kurds have become, ironically, the unifying force in Iraq.

In this endeavor, we will require wise leadership and American support. The American people have, as always, been generous. The process in Iraq has been slow and difficult and we have all made mistakes. We must learn from these mistakes. Wise and creative leadership, in both Iraq and the United States is crucial. The U.S. must continue to play an important role in our development, politically, economically and militarily.

We all look to the day when America's brave armed forces can return home with their heads held high, knowing it both helped rescue a country from the abyss and protected its own homeland and its allies from a tyrannical threat. That day, unfortunately, is not today: It is critical for US forces to continue working side-by-side with Iraqi forces in a fight with those that want to do us both harm. We are not naïve about the political climate in an election year in the U.S. We understand the growing impatience of the

American people. No war is easy to a people. And yet, I ask you, as elected representatives of your great people, to urge patience.

We are laying the groundwork and the fundamentals of a democratic society. We face many challenges, most we hope to win. Victory, however, requires that we stand together.

Thank you.